

# Project FLIGHT Annual Report 2009

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## **Project FLIGHT: A Brief Introduction.**

Project FLIGHT is a not-for-profit organization devoted to promoting literacy in children in school and at home through school and family literacy initiatives. It works collaboratively with families, practitioners, schools, community organizations and businesses locally, statewide, nationally, and internationally to achieve its objectives.

Since 1993, Project FLIGHT has been characterized as a community “jewel” enjoying collaborative relationships with senior institutions in the Western New York region such as the United Way Serving Erie County and *The Buffalo News*. Robert Bennett, Chancellor of the New York State Board of Regents, characterized Project FLIGHT by the following: “...literacy has been identified as one of the top three critical economic and social needs in our community. The establishment of Project FLIGHT is precisely what has been needed to help and is required today more than ever before. The important linkage between Project FLIGHT and schools and community agencies is the correct approach to this serious community issue. The contribution of Project FLIGHT, because of their multiple initiatives to the community, cannot be overstated.”

Since the establishment of the New York State Regent’s examinations, at-risk children, have consistently performed poorly. One of the most significant reasons for this “performance gap” is economically based. Categorically, students whose families are above the poverty line fare better than low-income students on key evaluations such as the fourth, eighth, and senior high New York State English and mathematics examinations. And, concomitantly, the basic needs of these children are marginally met as their level of poverty is among the highest in the nation. Many of these children come from homes lacking not just educational and literacy resources, but the basic necessities such as food, and adequate clothing, as well. These are children whose only warm meal takes place in the school cafeteria. According to federal guidelines, approximately 80% of the children in Buffalo live in poverty. And, in line with national trends, 50% of children living in poverty enter school at least 2 years behind their middle class peers.

The dimensions of this portrait become tragic as one contemplates the stark future for which these children are positioned. Researchers agree that educational attainment is one of the strongest predictors of an individual’s success. If the achievement gap is not bridged, New York State may soon join Texas and California in predicting future prison population growth as it correlates to poor third grade reading scores. (The problem, of course, is nationwide as one in every five people in the country, and in Buffalo, has trouble understanding these very words.)

Within the context of need and demonstrated outcomes, Project FLIGHT has become a preferred and effective vendor for Buffalo and area schools. FLIGHT’s approach, according to Linda Smolin, past Director of Reading for the Buffalo Public Schools, has made a significant contribution to the 3-point increase in reading scores on the 4<sup>th</sup> grade ELA

examination. These results are a product of supportive intervention literacy programs that have improved student performance. The following strategies characterize these programs:

- By **training teachers pre-k through 12<sup>th</sup> grade** and their parents on strategies that increase student performance.
- By training parents to establish a literacy-rich home environment by encouraging collaborative and independent reading.
- By providing Buffalo City Schools and other districts with assessment and evaluation tools.
- By initiating programs that focus on the New York State Standards, Closing the Gap Programs, and the Leave No Child Behind Initiative.
- By collaborating with Epic , Literacy Volunteers ,Good Schools for All, Buffalo Reads, area school districts, and other agencies on grants to effect student performance .
- By working hand-in-hand with The New York State Alliance for Family Literacy and the Buffalo Public Schools to found the first Family Literacy partnership tied directly to the State Education Department.
- By being designated by the State Education Department as a key agency to work in Western New York on family literacy programming.
- By providing, since 1993, resources and materials to hundreds of schools and agencies and reading materials to hundreds of thousands of children.
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### **Overview of Some Designations of Excellence**

#### **International**

- \* Invited to Represent the United States on Family Literacy at the United Nations Regional Conference in Austria, and at the World Conference in China
- \* Received commendations from China, Cameroon, the Union of South Africa, and France.
  - \* Invited to initiate NGO status with UNESCO.

#### **Federal**

- \*Received a Federal Gear-Up Grant - key program partner.
- \*Received commendation from Former President William Clinton.

#### **New York State**

- \*\*Received numerous commendations from the office of the 3 Governors, the Lt. Governor, and various New York State Senators and Assemblymembers.
- \*Recognized by the New York State Chancellor of the Board of Regents.
- \*Appointed Commissioner for National and Community Service, New York State.
  - \*\*Awarded the Governor's Award for Excellence in Education.
- Awarded the Governor's New York State Harriet Tubman Spirit Award.

#### **Regional**

- \*Invited by the New York State Department of Education and the Buffalo Public Schools to be a founding member of the Buffalo Family Literacy Alliance.
  - \*Preferred vendor with the Buffalo Public Schools

#### **Consultant (to)**

The Washington Post, The Buffalo News, National Children's Literacy Project, the Buffalo City Schools, New York State Department of Education, the New York State Department of Family and Social Services, the Board of Regents, United Way, Literacy Volunteers of America, New York State Alliance for Family Literacy, Haven House, and the Family Offensive Unit of the Erie County Sheriff's Department.

- FLIGHT’s leadership is made manifest by implementation of its program initiatives, which correlate with community needs. To demonstrate impact, examples of key local, national, and international programs are reviewed below, and organized around FLIGHT’s four program objectives which are: to empower children, families, teachers and service providers through dissemination of literacy resources; to provide students, pre-k through senior high, with materials, resources and strategies for successfully passing the regent’s examinations, to provide programmatic training and curriculum development for educators; to continue to facilitate community collaborations; and, to develop research initiatives and assessment tools that operationalize research-based knowledge for practical use and dissemination worldwide. Each of these objectives has been designed to effectively influence positive performance on the New York State Regents Mathematics and English Language Arts Standards, for students in kindergarten through high school.

### **Objective One: The Project FLIGHT BookBank**

**The Project FLIGHT BookBank:** To collect and distribute 250,000 books annually in the Buffalo area to **empower underprivileged children and families** in the effort to increase literacy. By virtue of the tremendous number of books made available to students in need, pre-k through senior high, all four of the Regent’s Standards are addressed. The BookBank provides the laboratory in which students are given age and content appropriate reading and reference materials. Examples of specific programs supporting student language arts performance include the following:

- **The Books for Kids (Co-Founder-1995-current).** *The Books for Kids Program* with the theme “Give a book touch a life,” has donated 1,863,971 books to children in over 1,745 schools and agencies and has created or contributed to 665 on-site libraries. This program addresses the Family Literacy childhood component. In 2009, the book drive provided 179,445 books to children served by over 139 service agencies and schools and established 38 additional on-site libraries). This program specifically addresses the need for children to read for meaning and interpretation, for literary response and expression, and for social interaction (NYS Standards 1, 2 & 4).
- **Libraries for Kids, (Co-Founder-2000-current)** This program, extends the notion of book donations to schools and community centers and has resulted in the refurbishment of thirty-eight area libraries. Each of the recipients received a \$5,000 grant and approximately 5,000 brand new books. This program was done in collaboration with area businesses and corporations. Schools which received this donation include the following: Autistic Services, Inc.-Williamsville, Burgard Comprehensive High School-Buffalo, Campus West School-Buffalo, Catholic Central School-Buffalo, Center for Handicapped Children-Cheektowaga, Dr. Antonia Pantoja Community School of Academic Excellence (School 18)-Buffalo, Discovery School #98-Buffalo, Fricano Primary School-Lockport, Harbor Heights School # 4-Buffalo, Herman Badillo Bilingual Academy #76-Buffalo, Houghton Academy #69-Buffalo, Lincoln Academy #44-Buffalo, Lynde School at Gateway-Longview-Williamsville, School 84-Buffalo, St. Bonaventure-Hamburg, Truman Elementary-Kenmore, and WEB School #71.

Schools receiving 2,000 books, as runners-up, include the following: Baker Road Alternative Jr. Sr. High/ Erie 2 BOCES-Angola, Blessed Sacrament-Kenmore, Campus West School # 96-Buffalo, Cattaraugus-Allegany BOCES-Ellicottville, Central Avenue Elementary School-Lancaster, Charter School for the Applied Technologies-Buffalo, Discovery School #98-Buffalo, Enterprise Charter School-Buffalo, Frontier

Middle School-Hamburg, Global Concepts Charter School-Buffalo, Harriet Ross Tubman Early Childhood Center-Buffalo, Heritage Heights Elementary – Cheektowaga, Lowry Middle School, Lackawanna Middle School-Lackawanna, LaSalle Middle School-Niagara Falls, Marilla Primary-Marilla, Mount Mercy Academy-Buffalo, North Park Academy-Buffalo, South Buffalo Charter School-Buffalo, St. Christopher School-Tonawanda, St. Paul’s School-Kenmore, St. Peter and Paul School-Williamsville, Stella Niagara Education Park-Niagara Falls, Stepping Stone Academy Charter School-Buffalo, and Westfield Elementary-Westfield. This program specifically addresses the need for children to read for meaning and interpretation (NYS Standard 1).

- **Braille Library for Children in the Buffalo City Schools, (Founder- 2005)** this program, which has been established at the Buffalo Public School number 3, with Evelyn Pizarro as principal, provided over 300 Braille books and large print books for students who are blind and visually impaired. The books were obtained from a grant written to the American Braille Association of America. Project FLIGHT has partnered with the New York State Commission for Child and Family Services, and the Buffalo City Schools to establish the first library of this kind in this area. This library is updated every year.
- **Kids Choice Awards, (2005 -present )** this program identifies a variety of books that children believe that other children should read. The Kids Choice Awards surveys hundreds of schools and thousands of children to determine the best read books.
- **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Literacy Initiative(2004-2009).** In promoting literacy for New York children, New York State, in partnership with Project Flight, established the Martin Luther King literacy drive, in 2004 that was held in New York City, Albany, and Buffalo, representing the 3 areas of the state. For this literacy drive, all state agencies were asked to collect new books for children from pre-k through middle school. All books and monies donated during the MLK literacy drive are distributed to children in the 3 areas noted. In each area, the superintendent of schools selected the recipient school most in need. For Buffalo, in 2005, over 20,000 books were given to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Multicultural Institute School # 39. In 2006, over 12,000 books were given to Highgate Heights, School #80; in 2007, Hamlin Park Elementary School # 74 received close to 20,000 books, in 2009, The Harriet Ross Tubman School received 33,556 books. In the spirit of Dr. King, Project Flight and the New York State Martin Luther King commemoration committee asked the question, “Why is reading important, and how does it change people’s lives?” Some say that, “A book can change the way a person looks at the world.” Isabel Allende said, “Books are the vehicles that move us from ignorance to understanding, from indifference to compassion, from disdain to respect. Oprah Winfrey said that books got her through a loveless childhood. Dr. Martin Luther King always emphasized the importance of reading, and education. He talks about being judged by the “...content of your mind, not by the color of your skin.” The importance of reading cannot be overstated.
- **The Cecilia Bard Multicultural Library for Peace.** Project Flight founded in 2004 an on-going special book collection that fosters peace for the E.H. Butler Library. The library receives approximately 500 volumes a year, including scholarly, adult, reference, and children’s books that include groups such as African-American, Asian, Latino, African, Arab, Caribbean, Native American; various religious denominations such as Catholic, Buddhist, Muslim, etc., and books on special constituencies, such as women, for the creation of the Cecilia Bard Multicultural Library for Peace. This special collection of 4,533 volumes is available to anyone in Western New York .The

collection was named after Dr. Bard's mother who died an untimely death. According to Dr. Bard, these books, "...will improve students' lives, and provide a way for them to appreciate the beautiful mosaic that makes up world cultures; these books also offer pathways for students to discover a common ground for unity and peace as well as respect for their differences. " The creation of this collection also aids the college, the largest teacher-education institution in the state, in addressing 3 issues of importance: the New York State Standards for Education, and for the National Certification, Accreditation for Teacher Education Programs (N-CATE) and Middle States accreditation process for the college.

- **The Wise-Elder Book Program.**

The WiseElder Book Program provided the shut-in elderly with books and books on tape in a variety of genres including: Romance, Mystery and Self-help. These books were distributed by Meals on Wheels of Buffalo and Erie County. In all, these recipients live in over twenty area communities throughout Western New York. The number of books donated totaled 30,500. The number of recipients served totaled 4,000. The number of volunteers participating totaled 1,774; the number from KeyBank included 27

### **Objective Two: Children and Families at Risk**

Students at Risk: To impact 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade literacy outcomes by providing a full menu of program and technical **assistance for teachers, service providers and parents** of at-risk elementary students. Examples of specific programs supporting student language arts performance include the following:

- **The SURR School Grant Program (Major Partner)**, this program supports student language arts performance in area Buffalo Public Schools, in partnership with Verizon. This grant assists the Reading Department in the BPS in preparing 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders in the seven SURR schools for the English Language Arts. This program Specifically addresses the need for children to read for meaning and interpretation, and for social interaction (Standards 1 & 3).
- **Tutorial Partnership Program, (Founder-2003-Present)** Project FLIGHT/Buffalo State/Buffalo Public Schools Tutorial Partnership: In the Buffalo City Schools "Reading for Results" Program, Project FLIGHT has provided, since 2003, trained (education majors to serve as tutors, and work 15 hours per week in at various Buffalo City Schools defined as at-risk or Under Registration Review. These tutors are trained by Dr Bard and her associates in state of the art assessment techniques and strategies such as Harcourt-1<sup>st</sup> Place Reading, Running Records, Square Four, and in mathematics, focusing on Investigations, Connected, Transition, and High School Mathematics. Tutors have and continue to work at Buffalo Public Schools which have included 6, 11, 17, 18, 27, 37, 45, 53, 54, 71, 74, 93, and at the Enterprise Charter School. The over 299 tutors provided over the last four years 18,070.5 hours of tutoring incorporating research based elements and systematic regular assessment to assist student literacy development. Of the various schools that Project FLIGHT was involved in, 13 improved scores significantly on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade English Language Arts Tests. Of the 13 schools, at the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, 12 showed significant improvement, with three coming off the SURR list and one being included on the most improved English Language Arts Scoring schools list. Enterprise Charter School students improved over 240% in achievement tests over the last year in English and Math

- **BookNooks (Founder-2001-current).** The BookNooks Program gives schools, teachers, parents and students, pre-k through senior high, with access to a carefully selected special collection of books and reading programs. This program was established in all of the elementary schools in Buffalo (54) and at Enterprise Charter School, as well as seven outlying area schools. In all, 31,706 new books were donated and the number of students and families served in the five area counties was over 80,056. The success of this program has been demonstrated by increased reading scores on standardized tests and by self-reported teacher/parent comments. This program specifically addresses the development of parents as reading partners with their children and addresses the need for children to read for meaning and interpretation. At the **high school** level, the mentoring of freshmen through seniors is accomplished by focus on all of the English Language Arts Standards (Standards 1, 2, 3, & 4).
- **The Full Service Schools Initiative (Co-Founder-1997-current)** this program, addressing the Family Literacy Adult Education and Intergenerational Components, was initiated as a result of the nationally funded United in FLIGHT grant. This full-service program, initiated in 1997, currently functions in select schools in Buffalo. This outstanding program, established at the initiative of the United Way Serving Erie County, has won numerous area awards for excellence. This program addresses each of the learning standards by nurturing the child's physical and psychological base.
- **Key to Literacy Program, (Founder-2001-current)** this program, addressing the need to stimulate parent and child reading experiences, was organized in collaboration with over 200 KeyBank employees. In Erie County, the program served 1,961 families. This program specifically addresses the need for children to read for meaning and interpretation, for literary response and expression, and for social interaction. In 2005, the focus was on the establishment of a financial literacy program created by Dr. Cappella and Dr. Bard, (eds.) (June 2005). *Smart Cents: From earning to saving, to spending, to investing: Real world math skills for children and teens to enhance economic independence.* Buffalo: Project FLIGHT. A program was also created at the African American Cultural Center for literacy enrichment (NYS Standards 1, 2 & 4).
- **Linkages: University/Community School Curriculum Projects. (Founder 1996-current).** A series of innovative collaborations for family literacy school projects between professors at Buffalo State, their cooperating students and various area school and community center parents and students (i.e., Grover Cleveland High School, South Park High School, McKinley High School, Bennett High School, Riverside High School, Amherst High School, Lackawanna High School, as well as School 18, The Enterprise Charter School, The Herman Badillo Bilingual School, Futures Academy, and Poplar Academy, Bethel Ame Church Youth Fellowship). The program focuses on all four New York State standards and specializes in a holistic approach to literacy.

### **Objective Three: The Family Literacy Alliance**

**The Family Literacy Alliance for the Western District of New York State:** This alliance was established with the Buffalo City Schools to implement Family Literacy efforts on behalf of local, educationally disadvantaged families by continuing to link Project FLIGHT **collaborative initiatives** with other local family literacy services and programs; manage consortium service providers; and continue to refine the family literacy model. It is also helping the school system conduct phonemic awareness training for

teachers. This objective directly addresses Standards 1 and 3. Training workshops provide instruction on current research-based reading instruction, comprehension, and mathematics skills. Specific programs support student language arts and mathematics performance.

#### **Objective Four: Advocacy, Publications, Scholarship and Applied Action Research**

**Advocacy:** To further develop research initiatives that operationalize research-based knowledge; disseminate information worldwide through papers, seminars and conferences; and books for teachers, service providers, parents and children on how to promote literacy. This Objective directly addresses all four standards with special attention given to home, school and community service organizations. Specific programs support student language arts and arithmetic skill development.

- **The Project FLIGHT Family Literacy Resource Center** This center provides educators with access to the current research, curriculum tapes and books, program and assessment materials in the field of family literacy and reading. (NYS Standards 1, 2, 3 & 4). The standards addressed depend upon the type of materials selected.
- **Publications and Resource Guides Promoting English and Arithmetic Literacy, for Parents, Teachers, Children, and Service Providers**
  - Cappella, B. and Bard, G. (January 2009). Providing a Holistic Family Literacy Developmental Model and Intervention Program to Support Foster Care Youth, their Families, and their Service Providers. Buffalo: Project FLIGHT.
  - Cappella, B. and Bard, G. (eds.) (January 2008). A Family Literacy Annotated Bibliography, Buffalo: Project FLIGHT.
  - Cappella, B. and Bard, G. (2007). “Turn the Page,” a monthly column in *The Buffalo News* which focuses on developing a family-home literate environment for children ages birth through young adulthood. Buffalo: Project FLIGHT.
  - Cappella, B. and Bard, G. (2008). Project FLIGHT’s suggested book list for parents, educators and children ages birth, compiled for the Governor’s “Leaders are Readers” initiative as part of the New York State Celebration of Martin Luther King. Buffalo: Project FLIGHT.
  - Bard, G. (2006-2007). Contributor to “The Word of the Day” column in *The Buffalo News*. Buffalo: Project FLIGHT.
  - Cappella, B. and Bard, G. (eds.) (June 2005). Smart Cents: From earning to saving, to spending, to investing: Real world math skills for children and teens to enhance economic independence. Buffalo: Project FLIGHT.
  - Cappella, B. and Bard, G. (eds.) (May 2002). Literacy and independent living skills for youth: A foster children’s resource guide. Buffalo: Project FLIGHT.
  - Cappella, B. and Bard, G. (eds.) (2000). Family literacy resource guide and directory. Buffalo: Project FLIGHT.
  - Cappella, B. and Bard, G. (eds.) (April 2000). Promoting the emergence of literacy and service learning skills through the development of child and parent assets: What parents and children need to succeed in a literate and compassionate world. Buffalo: Project FLIGHT.
  - Cappella, B. and Bard, G. (eds.) (2000). The parent guide for promoting a child’s reading success. Buffalo: Project FLIGHT.
- **International Programs:** Project Flight is well known in Western New York for donating over 250,000 books each year to the children, schools, agencies, and families

of Western New York. However, Project Flight's makes no distinctions between international or national programs when it comes to children in need: all children are served. Clearly, children in Buffalo are no different than children in Africa or China—they all have a hunger to learn about themselves and about the world. To that end, Project Flight helps fight illiteracy overseas as well as at home. Children and adults in countries all over the world are in need of books in English – books that can help play a role in their intellectual development, as well as in their understanding of American society and culture.

In 1999, upon hearing of an acute need for English language books and school supplies in a secondary school, “Les Hirondelles,” in Garoua, northern Cameroon, Project Flight responded by collecting and donating 12,500 textbooks and other reference materials to that school. These books were valued at an estimated quarter of a million dollars. As English is one of two official languages in Cameroon, these books were in high demand in this impoverished country. Two Buffalo State College graduates played a significant role in this project by identifying the need in Cameroon. They were very familiar with the problem because it was their parents who actually started the school. An additional Buffalo State connection to this project was the College's donation of computers, printers and typewriters to the school.

In 2000, Buffalo's Sister City in France, Lille, was the beneficiary of a books exchange program in which Project Flight donated 500 books dealing with American literature and civilization. These books were distributed to students with an avid interest in American and to disadvantaged individuals in northern France to improve their reading and writing skills. Also in 2000, Project Flight donated 1,200 Pre-K to 12 books to Colombia, South America for distribution to appropriate schools in that country.

A very ambitious program was undertaken in 2001 in which 6,800 books were donated by Project Flight to the city of Tianjin, China. These books were then distributed to six universities and school in that city. According to the Consul General for China, and these books were very much appreciated.

In 2002, Project Flight partnered with other organizations as part of the Doctors without Borders program to establish a literacy program in a devastatingly poor section of Mexico City, known as a “garbage dump” city. For this program, Project Flight donated a significant number of books, as well as sponsored and trained a Buffalo State student in how to tutor these students in literacy. This student was then sent to Mexico City to provide much needed tutoring to these disadvantaged people. In another development, that same year, Project Flight provided a generous donation of books to help establish a school in South Africa.

The donation, transport, and distribution of books overseas continue today in 2009, in Africa, South America and the Federated States of Micronesia. It is a very complicated process, requiring the assistance of many individuals and groups. Project Flight benefits from a very close working relationship with the International Student Affairs Office at Buffalo State College, headed by Dr. Jean F. Gounard. In additions, such overseas literacy efforts would not be possible without strong support from Buffalo State college president, Dr. Muriel Howard, and Buffalo State faculty, students, and alumni.

Project Flight is dedicated to building upon and expanding its international services, because the ability to read and write well is a universal human need. According to Dr.

Cappella, “The Legacy of Literacy is Democracy and Freedom.” Thou it is true that charity begins at home, its boundaries are limitless. In its most recent program, Project Flight is helping to provide resources and build a library through a Peace Corps volunteer, for schools in the Federated States of Micronesia, specifically the state Kosrae.